

PREFACE

While the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) acknowledges and respects the right to peaceful and lawful expressions of dissent, where such a protest involves the blockade of a highway, that right must be balanced against the right of all Ontarians to free and uninhibited passage within the Province of Ontario.

The blockading of a highway may have a variety of impacts, depending on a number of factors, including:

- The time of day,
- The time of year (i.e. long weekends etc.),
- The normal speed of traffic along the roadway,
- The volume of traffic along the roadway,
- The presence of any visual distractions to motorists,
- The resulting impact of traffic congestion to contiguous highways, secondary routes, or infrastructure (Is the backup impacting residential areas, school zones, major intersections, border crossings, etc.),
- Load and travel restrictions on alternative routes,
- Alternative route availability (are there easily accessible alternative routes),
- Access and egress routes,
- Roadway conditions,
- Weather conditions (i.e.: extreme heat or cold),
- Lighting conditions,
- The anticipated duration of the blockade,
- The presence, mood, and tolerance of non-participants,
- Significance of the roadway to support economic trade and viability
- Access to the roadway by emergency response and maintenance vehicles, including but not limited to: Police, Fire, EMS, Public works, and Ministry of Transportation, and/or
- The importance of the highway to support/maintain infrastructure (is the highway critical for accessing or maintaining other key infrastructure, such as hydro transformers, bridges, etc.),

All of these factors must be considered when determining the most appropriate response to a highway blockade.

Any OPP response to a highway blockade involving Aboriginal Critical Incidents shall be conducted in accordance with the Framework for Police Preparedness for Aboriginal Critical Incidents.

Authority to remove a highway blockade:

Where there is an immediate or imminent threat to public safety and security

Where the blockade poses an immediate or imminent threat to public safety and security, and there is no means or time to mitigate that threat, the Incident Commander may authorize the removal of the blockade through the safest and most expedient means available.

Where there is no imminent threat to public safety and security

Where the blockade poses no immediate or imminent threat to public safety and security, however, is causing substantial impacts to non-participants, the Incident Commander should liaise with the participants, through the Provincial Liaison Team (PLT), and commence a process of mediation, coupled with a measured response.

PLT should be engaged as soon as possible, and attempt to minimize the impacts of the blockade on non-participants.

The decision to remove a highway blockade that does not pose an immediate or imminent threat to public safety and security however is creating a substantial disruption to non-participants and/or has the potential to impact public safety and security shall be made by the Deputy of Field Operations, or the Deputy of Traffic Safety and Operational Support (if the situation impacts the Highway Safety Division).

Where authorization to remove a highway blockade exists, the Incident Commander shall develop an operational plan in consultation with the local Detachment taking into consideration the safety and security of all persons involved, including participants, non-participants and all emergency service providers.

Police Operational Response

Response Principles:

Police response in this situation is designed in accordance with the following principles:

- The need to mitigate the situation through a conciliatory, resolution based approach is recognized;

- The development and maintenance of appropriate communications with involved group or organization through the use of PLT;
- Continuous communication/liaison with involved participants and motoring public, while recognizing a need for a measured police response;
- Paramount is the necessity to protect life and property, and the maintenance of order on the highway. To that end, where justified, and no other alternatives are present, the use of criminal and/or other statute law to effect orderly traffic flow; and
- Should the use of force be required, a measured response will be utilized.

Operational Response

The PHBS is based on previous police responses to protests, including slow moving vehicles and blockades. It builds on previous experiences and recognizes the need for flexibility in response. The operational response should be thought in terms of an escalation in police response that is minimal and proportional to any increase in resistance by the protestors. Events associated with highway blockades shall be addressed at the lowest competent level in an effort to affect a peaceful resolution adhering to the principals of a measured response.

Officers managing a highway protest must be flexible and astute to recognize when there is a need for de-escalation in police response.

In brief, the following are the steps, which will be taken in response to any indication of organized traffic slowdowns or blockades:

- A supervisor from the respective detachment is dispatched;
- The attending Supervisor will make an assessment of the impact on public safety, traffic order, and duration while considering emergency vehicle routes, threat to public safety and available detours;
- The Emergency Detour Routes (EDR) will be reviewed and implemented, if applicable;
- The respective Detachment Commander and Provincial Communications Centre (PCC) will be notified;
- Regional Duty Officer (RDO) is to be notified. (RDO will ensure notifications are made to Regional Commander, Director of Operations, Crime Manager, and Traffic Manager);
- A PLT officer shall be assigned to make contact with the protest group;

- Intelligence gathering shall commence locally and be coordinated through the Provincial Operations Intelligence Bureau (POIB);
- The securing of evidence to support future prosecutions should be considered;
- Corporate Communications will be engaged through the local media officer to establish key messaging; and
- If the protest is believed to be a long-term blockade, or public safety is a concern, consideration will be given to appropriate closures.

Concept of Operations

Blockade Intelligence:

This plan is based on past experience, which indicates blockades may take several forms, namely:

- Short/long term rolling blockades, limited to one area;
- Short/long term rolling blockades, occurring simultaneously in several different locations;
- Short term full stoppage blockades occurring in one area;
- Long-term full stoppage blockades occurring in several different locations; and
- A combination of any of the above.

Operations:

- 1) In the event of reported protest activity, via the media, or motorist call-ins, the PCC supervisor will dispatch the closest patrol units (minimum of two officers) to attend. If the report is confirmed as a protest, the PCC supervisor will establish from the attending officer, the type of protest, speed if applicable, and direction of travel, number of participants, anticipated duration and impact on traffic order or public safety.
- 2) The PCC supervisor will then dispatch a patrol supervisor to the scene, and notify the respective detachment commander and Duty Officer.
- 3) The on-scene patrol supervisor shall consider requesting the necessary human resources to manage the situation depending on public safety and /or impact on traffic. The closure of ramps, lanes, or establishing police

presence to the rear of a rolling blockade to prevent other motorists from trying to drive through shall be considered.

- 4) The respective detachment commander will consult with Region to determine an appropriate course of action, namely:
 - a) If the blockade is transient in nature, has ended of its own volition, or as a result of police action, consideration should be given to the securing of any evidence for future prosecution, or
 - b) If the blockade is a full, long-term traffic stoppage, or there are simultaneous blockades, consideration should be given to partial, rolling, or complete highway closure, dependent on an assessment of the threat to public safety or potential impacts on traffic flow.
- 5) The on-scene PLT will liaise with the protest participants and leadership. Through effective communication, the PLT officers, will work towards minimizing the impacts of the protest.
- 6) Public and officer safety issues will be dealt with expeditiously to avoid deterioration of the situation. If it is determined that the removal of the blockade is necessary a measured response will be utilized.
- 7) In the event of the above, and in accordance with the approved Operations Plan, the Incident Commander will ensure the following resources are considered, as necessary (but not limited to):
 - Crime Unit,
 - Prisoner Transport,
 - Media Officer,
 - Scribe,
 - Emergency Response Teams,
 - EMS,
 - Logistics,
 - Forensic Identification Services,
 - Aviation Services,
 - Provincial Liaison Team, and/or
 - Ministry of Transportation Resources.

Other Resources to Consider for Response to Highway Blockade Events

- Framework for Police Preparedness for Aboriginal Critical Incidents,
- Police Officer's Guide to Public Demonstrations,
- Provincial Communications Centre Standard Operating Procedure Manual,
- Regional/Divisional (REOC/DEOC) Emergency Operation Centre Operational Plans.

Conclusion

This Provincial Highway Blockade Strategy allows for flexibility in responding to traffic blockades under a variety of circumstances, and should be viewed as a guideline, which can be altered to accommodate the situation. The key principle is to use the minimum police intervention required to restore the situation to a peaceful state. This plan is intended to support detachment operational plans when responding to highway blockade events.

The use of this Provincial Highway Blockade Strategy is to promote consistency in OPP response to highway blockades, throughout the province.